UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1996/NGO/2
28 June 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996
New York, 24 June-26 July 1996
Agenda item 6 (a)

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, dated 1 June 1996, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 1/ carries out a permanent programme on sustainable development. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), this programme has aimed at bringing about parliamentary action to implement Agenda 21 and report on such initiatives. On the occasion of the Ninety-fifth Inter-Parliamentary Conference (Istanbul, 15-20 April 1996), the IPU governing bodies reviewed progress and (a) adopted a political statement on financing and the transfer of technology, (b) formulated a proposal that national parliaments henceforth be considered major groups and (c) prepared a programme of work for IPU to contribute to the overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21 that the United Nations will carry out in 1997.

The follow-up to Rio: financing and transfer of technology

2. One of UNCED's essential achievements was its demonstration that the interdependence of nations was stronger than North/South confrontation. Economic growth, social development and the elimination of poverty in developing

countries were essential goals not only for developing countries themselves but for the achievement of sustainable development worldwide. It was agreed that the provision to developing countries of effective means, inter alia, financial resources and technology, without which it will be difficult to implement their commitments, will serve the common interests of developed and developing countries and of humankind in general, including future generations.

3. IPU has actively associated itself with the UNCED process. It considers that the provision of adequate financing and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies are essential components for the achievement of sustainable development. Accordingly, it has on many occasions encouraged its member parliaments to press their Governments to respect their commitments and to support their action to this end. Nevertheless, the UNCED follow-up evaluations carried out by the IPU Committee for Sustainable Development have clearly shown that difficulties in solving questions relating to financing and transfer of technology have gravely hindered efforts to implement the programme mapped out in Rio.

4. Rather than improving, this situation has for a number of reasons deteriorated in recent years. IPU deplores this state of affairs, which could well call into question the world partnership for sustainable development and threaten the survival of humankind over the long run. It recognizes that in the light of the worsening world economic situation, it is becoming more and more difficult for the Governments of North and South alike to keep their commitments, which impose heavy sacrifices on them in the immediate future and whose benefits will only be felt over the long term, on a planetary scale. However, mindful that the cost of inaction far outweighs the cost of applying the carefully thought-out decisions taken at UNCED, the IPU Council (its plenary decision-making body) issued a solemn declaration on the occasion of its recent meeting in Istanbul (April 1996). The declaration:

(a) Calls once again on the Governments of the developed countries to respect the commitments that they undertook by adopting Agenda 21, including those relating to granting the developing countries new and additional foreseeable financial resources, increasing official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of GNP and transferring ecotechnologies on favourable terms;

(b) Welcomes the pragmatic approach adopted recently by the Commission on Sustainable Development, which consists of putting figures to needs on a sector-by-sector basis, and strongly urges the Commission to continue its work along these lines;

(c) Stresses the need to supplement and reinforce international financial flows by improving the efficiency of aid and by mobilizing national resources in both developed and developing countries, particularly through economic instruments and policy reforms as well as by the creation of national environmental funds;

(d) Deems it necessary to cut subsidies that reduce economic efficiency and cause environmental degradation, while offsetting such cuts by direct income support to the most vulnerable groups;

(e) Stresses the fact that the Governments of developed and developing countries themselves have a joint responsibility to take measures to encourage foreign private investment in developing countries that is capable of contributing to sustainable development and guaranteeing the stability of private capital flows;

(f) Reaffirms that further progress is essential if an effective, sustainable and development-centred solution is to be found to the problem of the indebtedness of the developing countries, in particular the poorest and the most indebted ones. In this connection, it encourages the introduction of innovative mechanisms, such as debt-for-nature swaps or debt-for-social-development swaps;

(g) Urges international financial institutions and development agencies to redouble their efforts to integrate the economic, social and environmental goals of sustainable development in their institutional strategies and priorities;

(h) Stresses, as far as the transfer of technologies is concerned, that they should be demand-centred, environmentally sound and tailored to meet the needs of their potential users, in the light of the social, economic and cultural situation and priorities of the country concerned;

(i) Calls on Governments to set minimum environmental standards for technology transfer and cooperation in this field, to integrate ecotechnologies in technical assistance programmes and to take concrete steps to encourage partnership agreements between suppliers of technologies and potential users. They should in particular strengthen cooperation between government bodies, the private sector and scientific and technical institutions at the national level;

(j) Recalls that the private sector plays an essential role in technology transfer and that it is up to Governments to create conditions conducive to such transfer. To this end, it urges the Governments of the developed countries to use in particular financial and tax incentives to encourage private enterprises to promote and accelerate the transfer of ecotechnologies in the developing countries; it further calls on the developing countries to establish a transparent and reliable legal framework and to make the necessary efforts to acquire, assess, adapt and utilize ecotechnologies. Furthermore, these countries should strive to make more use of local technologies that are likely to foster sustainable development;

(k) Finally, urges the parliaments and parliamentarians of the world, as guardians of the public interest, to take full advantage of the mechanisms and means of action at their disposal to maintain, in their countries, the essential political will to apply these decisions.

5. By adopting this Declaration, the IPU Council called on decision makers throughout the world to seize the occasion of the 1997 general assessment to launch the spirit of Rio anew and to guarantee that the vast hopes created by UNCED are not disappointed.

Parliament as a major group

6. Agenda 21 declares that one of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making. It also affirms that the commitment and genuine involvement of all social groups is critical to the effective implementation of the objectives, policies and mechanisms agreed to by Governments in all programme areas of Agenda 21.

7. In every State, the national Parliament is the very embodiment of civil society. It is a key institution in the organization and functioning of the State. Its fundamental role is to represent and express the will of the people at State level. The Parliament, made up of men and women who are elected by the citizens at large and are in direct contact with the population and associations of their constituencies, is the most natural and legitimate institutions to represent the common interest of the various components of civil society.

8. The national Parliament plays a crucial role as the vehicle that provides the legislative framework for sustainable development activities. This is done through the ratification of relevant international conventions and agreements, the adoption of implementing legislation, the enactment of new laws (general or "framework" laws as well as enabling legislation in specific fields), and the adoption and harmonization of existing laws. As part of this legislative function, the Parliament also adopts the national budget and thus appropriates the State's budgetary resources and determines, for example, the financial allocations that will be given to sustainable development activities.

9. Each nation's Parliament also exercises executive oversight. Through parliamentary debates, it participates in the setting of State policy and it monitors the overall activities of Government, including in the field of sustainable development. This is done through a variety of parliamentary mechanisms (written and oral questions to ministers, special commissions of enquiry, for example) but also in its control of governmental public expenditure.

10. Action by the Parliament and its members is crucial not only for the implementation of policies and programmes of sustainable development but also for relaying and explaining to the public the issues involved and therefore also in forging popular support for such action. Members of Parliament engage in a direct and continuous dialogue with their constituents, which serves to build awareness among the general public of sustainable development issues. Moreover, the Parliament provides institutional and direct popular participation in the parliamentary decision-making process through hearings and parliamentary inquiries.

11. In order to strengthen the action carried out by IPU over the last several years to provide a parliamentary dimension to the follow-up to UNCED and for the reasons given above, the Union's governing bodies pursuant to the decision it took on 20 April 1996 requests that national parliaments be added to the category of major groups in the sense of this term as used in Agenda 21. For its part, IPU will be pleased to continue and strengthen its support to promote and report on parliamentary action to implement Agenda 21. Moreover, it

considers that this would be a further manifestation of the closer cooperation between the United Nations and IPU that the United Nations General Assembly calls for in its resolution 50/15 of 15 November 1995.

IPU contribution to the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 that the United Nations will carry out in 1997

12. At its session in Istanbul in April 1996, the IPU Council also decided to extend its full support and contribute to the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 that the United Nations will undertake in 1997 and that will culminate in a special session of the General Assembly. In that context, IPU will prepare and submit an overall review of parliamentary action to implement Agenda 21. This study will build upon the two inquiries already carried out by the IPU Committee for Sustainable Development in 1994 and 1995, and will use information obtained through a new survey of all national parliaments and, in particular, parliamentary committees dealing with environment and sustainable development issues.

13. There is a growing international consensus of the need to focus on unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and to develop national policies and strategies to encourage changes in such patterns. For this reason, IPU decided to organize a debate and prepare a statement on changing consumption and production patterns in the early part of 1997.

14. The issue of financial resources and mechanisms, particularly commitments undertaken by industrialized countries in this respect and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, is likely to remain a major concern in regard to the implementation of Agenda 21. The Union has therefore also decided to submit a further political statement on financing and technology transfer.

15. In 1994, the IPU published the first worldwide Directory of Parliamentary Bodies for Environment. This publication has been greatly appreciated and has proved its worth, both to facilitate contacts and as an educational tool, and an updated edition will be published in 1997.

16. Finally, the IPU governing Council called upon all national parliaments to devote one plenary sitting to consider progress in implementing Agenda 21. This should also provide an opportunity for national parliaments to contribute to the overall review and assessment that their respective Governments will undertake in preparation for next year's special session of the General Assembly.

Notes

1/ The national parliaments of 133 countries are represented in IPU, which also has three associate members, as follows. Members: Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire,

Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, San Marino, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe; associate members: Andean Parliament, Latin American Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

UNITED NATIONS **E**

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1996/NGO/3
28 June 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996
New York, 24 June-26 July 1996
Agenda item 5 (e)

SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS

ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION'S SPECIFIC FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES TO THE WORK OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) believes that the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women are commitments of the State. One of the branches of the State, the Parliament, is an indispensable actor in obtaining the enabling legislation as well as the funds needed to carry out the programmes envisaged by national administrations to give effect to international agreements. Accordingly, IPU participated in the preparatory process of the Fourth World Conference on Women and contributed to it through various initiatives. 1/ It is now actively engaged in the follow-up to the Conference.

This activity to follow up the work of the Beijing Conference covers the various aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action, but IPU is giving priority to the part of that text dealing with women's participation in political life and the decision-making process. The follow-up of that part is carried out jointly with follow-up to two IPU documents, the Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life

adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council in March 1994, and the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration adopted on Parliamentarians' Day, 7 September 1995, in the Chinese National People's Congress. 1/

In addition to in-depth national action (regarding attitudes, education, political parties, electoral procedures etc.), the Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life envisages action at the international level, some aspects of which concern first and foremost women's participation in political life, while others concern the working of IPU itself.

I. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN CONCERNING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN GENERAL AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND PARLIAMENTARY LIFE IN PARTICULAR

Comparative surveys and studies

Building on the success of its previous comparative world surveys on women's participation in political and parliamentary life, 2/ IPU launched a new world inquiry in late 1995 on women's participation in political life designed to explore in more depth certain aspects of this question, which had already been taken up in its earlier work. The inquiry should lead to the publication in late 1996 of a world comparative survey focusing on women in political parties and the way in which the electoral process affects and benefits women.

Inter-parliamentary symposium on the theme "Towards partnership between men and women in politics" and round table with the media on "The image of women politicians in the media"

This symposium will be held in New Delhi from 10 to 14 February 1997 at the invitation of the Indian Parliament; the round table, a related event, will take place on 10 February. The agenda, timetable and working arrangements of the symposium were approved by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at the IPU meetings in Istanbul in April 1996. The comparative survey referred to above, the above-mentioned IPU Plan of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration will constitute the main tools for reflection for this meeting. In the context of the development of cooperation between IPU and the United Nations, it is planned to present the results of the symposium and the survey to the 1997 session of the Commission on the Status of Women as a special contribution to its debate on follow-up to the chapter of the Beijing Platform for Action concerning women's participation in the decision-making process.

II. FOLLOW-UP TO OTHER ASPECTS OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Besides being called upon to consider at its Conference themes covered by recommendations in the Beijing Platform for Action, IPU is henceforth attentive to the need to take account of the "women factor" in all its resolutions; women members of Parliament (MPs), who have succeeded in ensuring that any drafting

committee set up within IPU comprises a gender balance (rule 15 of the rules of the study committees), have agreed to take explicit action in this respect.

In addition, the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians, the permanent consultation mechanism that has been operating in IPU for nearly 20 years, has decided to hold a twice-yearly general debate on national action to follow up the Beijing Platform for Action, and a specific debate at each session on one of the 12 critical areas of concern featured in that text. The activities described below have already been carried out or are scheduled to be carried out.

Overall national follow-up

At their meetings in Bucharest (October 1995) and Istanbul (April 1996), women MPs embarked on a discussion of the most effective measures to give effect to the work of the Conference at the national level. This has given rise to an exchange of views and experiences on legislative activities and various parliamentary initiatives, as well as information and awareness-building activities for the population at large. The discussion will be continued at future meetings of women MPs.

Women and the media

At their Bucharest meeting (October 1995), women MPs discussed the question "Media impact on the status of women: ways and means of shaping a fresh mentality towards women's status". As mentioned above, the image of women politicians in the media will also be debated during the New Delhi symposium.

Violence against women

At their Istanbul meeting (April 1996), women MPs reverted to earlier work (1991-1994) on the question of violence against women, and discussed the question "Organized violence against women". Following that exchange of views, a letter was sent in May 1996 to all national parliaments to draw their attention to the framework for model legislation on domestic violence drafted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Mrs. Radhika Coomaraswamy.

Poverty

At their meeting in Beijing (September 1996), women MPs will consider the following subject: "Poverty and extreme poverty: women as victims of this phenomenon and as key actors in its eradication".

III. ACTIONS CONCERNING THE WORKING OF IPU

Since September 1995, IPU has undertaken and completed two important changes in its own working that were advocated in its Plan of Action and that correspond to the spirit of the work of the Beijing Conference.

Revision of the statutes and rules to eliminate terms suggesting the superiority of one sex over the other

Conceived as a pedagogical exercise designed to change mentalities, this revision was specifically foreseen in the IPU Plan of Action. Amendments to the statutes and rules prepared between October 1995 and April 1996 were adopted at IPU meetings in Istanbul in April 1996.

Increased representation of women in delegations to IPU meetings

As from 1990, IPU statutes contain a provision for all parliaments that have women members to include at least one woman among the eight MPs (or 10, as the case may be) who comprise the national delegation to IPU meetings. After the Conference and as a means of supporting that provision and ensuring that it is respected, the Union's governing bodies asked the Secretary-General to prepare for each of the two annual statutory IPU sessions a comparative table showing the number and proportion of women in national parliaments in relation to their number and proportion in delegations to meetings organized by IPU. The first comparative table was produced on the occasion of IPU meetings in Istanbul in April 1996.

Notes

1/ The main initiatives of IPU have been:

(a) The preparation and adoption one and a half years before the Conference of the Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life, designed as a basis for the chapter of the Beijing Platform for Action dealing with women's participation in the decision-making process;

(b) As a contribution to the reflection of participants at the Beijing Conference, the publication of a comparative world survey, entitled Women in Parliaments: 1945-1995 and a colour-coded world map showing the number and percentage of women in the 178 national parliaments existing as at 30 June 1995;

(c) The holding of a Parliamentarians' Day in the Great Hall of the People of the Chinese National People's Congress, chaired by Mrs. Chen Muhua, Vice-President of the Standing Committee of the Congress and President of the Fourth World Conference on Women; 500 MPs from 102 countries took part in the meeting, which ended with the adoption of the Beijing Parliamentary Declaration;

(d) The organization in Beijing, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, of a round table on the complementarity of women's rights and children's rights, at which participants included MPs, government representatives, experts and representatiyes of non-governmental organizations.

2/ The most recent surveys gave rise to the following publications: Women and Political Power (1992), Women in Parliaments: 1945-1995 (1995), and a colour-coded poster, Women in Parliaments as at 30 June 1995 (fifth edition); the latter two publications were presented at the Conference.

UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1996/NGO/4
3 July 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996
New York, 24 June-26 July 1996
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS OF SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Between 1972 and 1991, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) held seven Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as part of a continuing process. That activity had a Mediterranean component; then, in 1990/91, the IPU embarked on a process specific to that region.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CSCM PROCESS

All the Mediterranean partners. In order that the desired partnership could be established without creating new imbalances, it was agreed from the outset that the Parliaments of all Mediterranean countries should participate in the process.

Main participants: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Monaco, Morocco, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, Yugoslavia.

Associate participants:

Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States of America;

Palestine;

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Assembly of the Western European Union, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Consultative Council of the Arab Maghreb Union, European Parliament, Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Observers: All other members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Three "baskets"

1st Basket: Political and Security-Related Cooperation: Regional Stability

2nd Basket: Economic Cooperation: Co-development and Partnership

3rd Basket: Dialogue Among Civilizations and Human Rights

The formula of consensus. The formula of consensus was chosen as the means for decision on all the points under discussion.

A dynamic approach fostering the settlement of conflicts and their prevention. Without disregarding the conflicts then under way, the 1st CSCM recognized that it was not mandated to devise direct solutions to conflicts that had long been under way in the region, in some cases for decades; but its purpose was to launch a pragmatic process of cooperation which would gradually gain in strength

and coverage, generate a positive and irreversible momentum and facilitate the settlement of those conflicts. Subsequently, that approach has constantly been reaffirmed.

An "integrated" approach. All the factors which contribute to security, stability and development in the region are dealt with together in the context of the process.

The spirit of the process. Gradually, confidence as the cement of relations and partnership as the basis for exchanges in all areas have emerged as the real foundations of the process. It has been essential to develop an inter-Mediterranean dialogue based on tolerance, mutual respect, justice and equality.

STAGES AND MECHANISMS OF THE PROCESS OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY CSCM

1st CSCM. The Mediterranean project became operational with the holding of the first Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (1st CSCM) in Malaga from 15 to 20 June 1992, under the chairmanship of the President of the Spanish Congress of Deputies. The Final Document adopted by consensus at the end of this 1st CSCM, which is said to have been a considerable source of inspiration to those who drafted the Declaration and Working Programme of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference (Barcelona, November 1995), confirmed the basic principles of the process and set up the general framework for cooperation between the Mediterranean partners.

Permanent consultation mechanism for the parties to the process. Following the Malaga Conference, the IPU decided to set up a permanent consultation mechanism for the representatives of the parties to the process. Held twice yearly, the consultations serve to maintain and deepen the Mediterranean dialogue at the parliamentary level; they provide the opportunity to review developments concerning the setting up of an intergovernmental mechanism for the CSCM and encourage such action, and assist in the development of both multilateral and bilateral cooperation between the parties concerned. It is in this context that preparations were made for a second CSCM.

The 2nd CSCM and preparatory meetings. To prepare for the 2nd CSCM, three specialized meetings were held: one, on the subjects of the 3rd Basket, took place in July 1994, in Cagliari, Sardinia, at the invitation of the Italian Parliament; the second, relating to the 2nd Basket, was held in Izmir in November 1994 at the invitation of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey; and the third, on the 1st Basket, was held in Alexandria in June 1995 at the invitation of the People's Assembly of Egypt. The 2nd CSCM then took place from 1 to 4 November 1995 in Valletta and was chaired by the Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives. The Final Document adopted by consensus at the end of the Valletta Conference reaffirms the principles and recommendations formulated at the 1st CSCM and at the same time expands and updates them. It takes up and deals with many delicate questions such as terrorism and corruption or the fundamentals of democracy, and opens new perspectives for Mediterranean cooperation.

The 3rd CSCM and preparatory meetings. Since then, the IPU has taken up an invitation from the Tunisian Parliament to hold the 3rd CSCM in Tunis by 1999 and has decided to hold a series of short thematic preparatory meetings, the first of which will be held in Monaco in May 1997 at the invitation of the Parliament of Monaco and will focus on employment and related issues.

Towards an association of Mediterranean States. The Final Document of the Valletta Conference affirms the need henceforth to provide a solid institutional base for the process of Mediterranean cooperation, both at governmental and parliamentary levels, and thus recommends the creation of an association of Mediterranean States, open to all the Mediterranean coastal countries and to those countries whose destiny is directly linked to that Sea. It indicates that the aim of the association would be to foster relations of confidence between Mediterranean States so as to ensure regional security and stability and to unite their endeavours in a true spirit of partnership with a view to the harmonious development of the different States.

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS IN FIELDS OF INTEREST TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

The documents adopted by the IPU Conferences and meetings on security and cooperation in the Mediterranean cover the whole range of questions in the three baskets. Some of those of direct interest to the Council are briefly mentioned here:

Democracy and human rights, the key to sustainable development. The 2nd CSCM affirmed that good governance, transparency in administration, the fight against corruption and measures to prevent the flight of public funds and the misappropriation at the source or the receiving end of resources for development aid were key factors in democracy and sustainable social development. It also pointed out that the watch-dog role played by the media made a significant contribution to good governance and called for respect for press freedom and for free access to information in all Mediterranean countries. The 2nd CSCM also advocated the teaching of the principles and basics of democracy and of how national institutions function, as the best way of making sure that democracy takes root in people's minds and that people participate in a conscious and responsible manner in the management of public affairs. And in order to root democracy in Mediterranean institutions, it advocated, among other measures, the strengthening of national mechanisms for controlling public finance.

The Valletta Conference recalled the universal, indivisible and independent nature of human rights. It reaffirmed that human rights and fundamental freedoms were a matter of international concern since respect for them was one of the foundations of international order and therefore declared that respect for the undertakings of any State of the region in that field was a subject of legitimate concern for all the other States.

It also reaffirmed that the concept of democracy would only take on real and dynamic meaning once political orientations and national legislations had been decided upon jointly by men and women taking equitable account of the interests and specific talents of both halves of the population.

Combating terrorism. Denouncing terrorism, which leads to repression and thus launches a vicious circle, the IPU made a point of stating firmly that, however legitimate it may be, no struggle can justify indiscriminate attacks. It also stressed the vital need for anti-terrorism security measures to be backed by structural measures designed to further economic and social development and strengthen representative democracy and by the extension of democracy and the consolidation of human rights.

A contract for economic and social solidarity based on the well-appreciated interest of the various partners. Disparities in economic, commercial, demographic, social and technological areas threaten to make the Mediterranean a fault line between the north and the south. Accordingly, while stressing the positive nature of the building of Europe, the 2nd CSCM pointed out that the construction and stability of a united Europe could be impaired without a forward-looking vision of relations with the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries and adequate development in those countries. Europe would be weakened if, by applying policies inspired by reflexes based on fear or the temptation to dominate, it were to "close itself off" to the South and let the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean become mired in poverty, political instability and economic stagnation. The Conference added that the European countries were well aware that it was in their interest to support democratization projects that would encourage the peoples of the southern and eastern Mediterranean to remain in their countries, thus heading off a worsening of population flows towards the north where, in the context of increasing unemployment, those flows were awakening xenophobia and withdrawal as well as racist violence.

Development of an intra-Mediterranean economic space. One of the main measures advocated by the 2nd CSCM was the establishment of an economic and financial partnership which, taking into account the different degrees of development, would be based (among other things) on the progressive establishment of a free trade area.

Human resources and population movements. With the aim of reducing the number of migrant workers and promoting the sustainable development of the countries concerned, the 2nd CSCM advocated the setting up and further improvement of educational and vocational training programmes for young people and adults in countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, encouraged the countries on the northern side to support those programmes by means of a financial contribution or technical assistance, and emphasized that one way of preventing the brain-drain from the south to the north was the implementation of large-scale development projects in the south.

Management of water resources. The 2nd CSCM noted that proper water management was one of the fundamental factors of sustainable development and also contributed to the maintenance of good relations between Mediterranean countries and called on Mediterranean countries to move towards regular evaluations of those resources and to manage them from a long-term perspective. Noting additionally that population growth and accelerated urban development in certain southern countries would leave them vulnerable sooner or later to the depletion of their conventional water resources, it advocated the allocation of funds designed to ensure the further refinement of technologies for the use of

alternative resources such as fossil tables, desalinated sea-water and brine water, and for the processing of liquid waste.

UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1996/NGO/5
12 July 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996
New York, 24 June-26 July 1996
Agenda item 5 (f)

SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS:
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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As the Economic and Social Council meets to consider the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development with regard to the eradication of poverty this year, which is dedicated to that noble aim, it is important to review the status of older persons. Recognizing the impressive growth of the world's elder population, which has already made its mark, and considering the demographic projections for the future, which are well known by now, it is important to revisit the particular references to older persons in the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, chapter II (Eradication of poverty), section D, paragraph 40:

"Particular efforts should be made to protect older persons, including those with disabilities, by:

"(a) Strengthening family support systems;

"(b) Improving the situation of older persons, in particular in cases where they lack adequate family support, including rural older persons, working older persons, those affected by armed conflicts and natural or

man-made disasters, and those who are exploited, physically or psychologically neglected, or abused;

"(c) Ensuring that older persons are able to meet their basic human needs through access to social services and social security, that those in need are assisted, and that older persons are protected from abuse and violence and are treated as a resource and not a burden;

"(d) Providing assistance to grandparents who have been required to assume responsibility for children, particularly of parents who are affected by serious diseases, including AIDS or leprosy, or others who are unable to care for their dependants;

"(e) Creating a financial environment that encourages people to save for their old age;

"(f) Strengthening measures and mechanisms to ensure that retired workers do not fall into poverty, taking into account their contribution to the development of their countries;

"(g) Encouraging and supporting cross-generational participation in policy and programme development and in decision-making bodies at all levels."

The International Federation on Ageing, as a member organization of the NGO Committee on Ageing, is encouraged by the deliberations of the Economic and Social Council in the present session and is grateful for this opportunity to share its views with you.

UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1996/NGO/6
17 July 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996
New York, 24 June-26 July 1996
Agenda item 5 (e)

SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS:
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Statement submitted by Franciscans International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

* * *

There are more 1 million Franciscan women and men, who are found in almost every country in the world. We follow an 800-year tradition, begun by Saint Francis of Assisi (Italy), that emphasizes a simple lifestyle, with works of direct service to the poor and needy, a great love for creation and a firm commitment to making peace among all peoples.

Franciscans International welcomes this opportunity to comment on the report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 (E/1996/16). We appreciate the thoroughness of the report, integrating as it does key objectives from recent world conferences with those of the Beijing Platform for Action. 1/

Informed, inter alia, by many of our Franciscans in the field, we wish to recommend that the following three fundamental objectives be emphasized to the fullest extent throughout the United Nations system:

(a) Recalling the statement made during the current session of the Council by the representative of the World Bank that the best investment a developing country can make today is in the education of the girl child, we emphasize, with reference to paragraph 60 of the ACC report, that countries in which women are

at a serious disadvantage compared with men should continue to commit 60 per cent of programme resources to targeting women and girls in order to increase girls' attendance at school to 50 per cent;

(b) Recalling, as stated in paragraph 38 of the Beijing Platform for Action, that discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life, we emphasize, with reference to paragraph 234 of the ACC report, that better accounting should be taken of recent changes in the sex ratio at birth in relation to prenatal sex selection. We further recommend that the concept of son preference be addressed directly as a harmful attitude and practice and linked with female infanticide, as it was in paragraphs 259 and 277 (c) of the Beijing Platform for Action;

(c) The free market is no longer free or viable. The free market or world economy - that relies on unsustainable first world consumption, unregulated transnational corporations, maquiladoras or virtual slave labour, and a third world debt based largely on military spending, and has produced a worldwide recession, with 1 billion people, of whom the overwhelming majority are women, living in abject poverty - needs to be critically re-examined. Within the parameters of research and analysis concerning the effects of the internationalization and globalization of economies, including technological change, we recommend, with reference to paragraph 131 of the ACC report, that a critique be made of the free market system itself so as to contribute to the formulation of world economies that are sustainable as well as sustained.

Notes

1/ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.